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A PRIMER ON SOCIALISM

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SOCIALIZING A STATE

BY

LAURENCE GROUNDLUND.

It is possible to convert a state of our Union—not into a fully Socialistic Commonwealth, but into a body that decidedly will be an approach to it.

What pleases me in the Social Democracy Colony scheme, and makes me heartily commend it, is its ulterior and principal idea to capture a state politically, and afterwards through legislation and constitutional amendment to socialize its institutions.

But in all undertakings it is necessary to know our limitations; and hence we should here be aware that it is impossible to introduce complete socialism in a State—that is, to do away with the competitive regime or even compete private enterprise out of existence—as long as exists our present federal constitution and the present Supreme Court to interpret it.

But we can bring a State to the threshold of Socialism, and this may be of immense benefit to our cause, to our nation, and to the world. Certainly it would be perfect folly if we Socialists did not make full use of that feature in our system of government which is the main contribution our people have made to the science of government, to-wit: Our federated system of Commonwealths, which permits us make political, social and economic experiments in one State for the benefit of the rest.

The American people are by nature empiricists; they like nothing better than to make experiments. Innumerable such experiments in law making have already been made by this

or that State, and the others have been awaiting the results—like the so-called “Dispensary Law” of South Carolina. Albert Shaw, of the Review of Reviews, says on this subject: “In the Western States there is ever a readiness, which is even amusing, to try experiments which would vastly extend the sphere of the State and limit private enterprise.”

Again, we ought to bear in mind that the closing years of the century is the best possible time for us to exert ourselves. The competitive regime is rushing to its destruction, not on a straight downward road but in a wave-like line; at present we are on the top of the last wave: Prosperity has set in, but in a few years we shall have harder times than our people ever experienced before. Let us utilize this breathing spell!

There are, as I conceive it, seven grand measures which will bring a State to the threshold of Socialism, which are within the jurisdiction of the State, and which will be far from “amusing” to our capital holders, to-wit: State productive work for the unemployed; effective Trade Unions and Obligatory Industrial Arbitration; State management of the liquor traffic; State control of mines; Municipalization of lighting, electric power, street cars and the telephone; State savings banks and loan offices, and compulsory education of children from four to fourteen years, with kindergarten and manual training methods; besides, as an adjunct to these, a State income tax.

Of these institutions I look on State productive work for the unemployed as by far the most important, and contend that it is perfectly practicable. But note, that it is strictly with the class of the unemployed that we are concerned; it is for them we are making provision. Now an “unemployed” does not mean a man who cannot work or will not work, but means precisely one who both can and will work whenever he gets a chance. Note again, that it is productive work that is required. The unemployed should be divided into two classes of skilled and unskilled men. Set the latter to work on the streets and the roads, but the former should be as-

signed to their various trades as far as practicable. A man should never be set to do work that he cannot do well; it is degrading that a skillful watchmaker should be made to saw wood.

Do my readers know that there is still a law on the statute books of Pennsylvania, 120 years old, to this effect: "When a citizen of this state is out of work, the overseer of the poor shall furnish him with raw materials, with tools and a workshop?" Enact and enforce such a law and a State can immediately banish the real cause of hard times from its borders.

Of course the very first objection that will be raised, is: What is the State to do with the products of all that labor? Where is a market to be found for them? Ah, that is just the beauty of this project, that no market is needed. The unemployed will furnish a market among themselves, ready at hand, from the instant of their gathering together. They will all be hungry, of course; very naturally there are bakers to be found among them, or men that readily can be turned into bakers. Provide them with flour and ovens and let them bake bread for the whole party. Most of them are shoeless; there are shoe-makers among them. Give them leather and tools and they will go to work and make footgear for all. So with clothing, with hats, with everything they need or may want;—the plan is, in other words, that these unemployed shall work in order to relieve each others' necessities. Whenever their wants are fully satisfied, and a continuance of their industry will evidently result in a useless surplus, why then they reduce their working hours—a most natural remedy.

"But who is going to pay for all this?" will of course be asked. In answer I remind you of the definition I gave of the unemployed—an able bodied man who is glad to work whenever he can find work to do. Such an "unemployed," I contend, can always earn enough to maintain himself and family, and also re-imburse the State for all its outlays. This re-imbursement, and payment even of a moderate interest on

these outlays, can easily be made up from the earnings of the unskilled (on the roads of the State) who are supposed to be supported from the labor of the skilled workmen.

But the State must make an advance. To be sure it must? and this advance must be raised either by borrowing or by taxes. Please, however, to bear in mind that these means have to be created only once for all; there will be no yearly drain, no loss of resources, since we have supposed that these unemployed restore to the State its whole outlay every year, which thus will be available every ensuing year for the same number of beneficiaries. If, now, bonds be issued, all that the State virtually will do is to lend its credit, for the unemployed defray the interest. But suppose a tax be necessary? Then I suggest that nothing can be fairer than a State income tax.

I have no doubt that the measure will be met by this suggestion: "So you advise our State to invite the tramps from the whole country to come here and actually swamp our people?"

This objector forgets that it is not tramps we are concerned about, but unemployed men. At present tramps lead a comparatively easy life, because kind-hearted people know that there are thousands of good men who cannot find work, from whom the real tramps cannot be easily distinguished; but when these people know that an opportunity is open to every one willing to work, they will cease to feel pity for every way-faring fellow, and the consequence will be that the tramps will give that State a wide berth which introduces public employment. On the other hand, can the State be swamped by really useful people? Every one of our States seems rather proud of making a good showing every census year in regard to an increased population. I should say that any State would and should deem it a great benefit if public employment should make it one of the greatest and most populous among its sister States.

I know full well that there is one final, stubborn objection

—the reason why the Pennsylvania statute was never enforced—to-wit: That though the State productive work need not interfere with private employers, it yet is totally opposed to the spirit of private enterprise and the competitive regime. That is true, and that is why Socialists would insist on it until they can do better. The spirit of this miserable profit mongering will not allow any poor fellow to earn a living for himself and family unless some other man can make a profit out of him. It is for the sake of profit that employers carry on their enterprises, and when they can no longer make their accustomed profits we have seen them, during the last few years, shut down their factories and close their shops. But when Socialists become strong enough, then the State will step in and say: "Gentlemen, when you so unceremoniously abdicate your functions then I will step into your shoes and perform your duties. I am ready and able to do this, for I, the State, care nothing at all for profit, but only for my citizens having steady employment and decent rewards."

The other measures or institutions recommended, are of such importance that I shall have to defer their consideration to another time and shall devote the rest of this paper to effective Trades Unions and Obligatory Arbitration. Surely these in themselves are of sufficiently great importance; the State that can present the others with a model worthy of being copied will deserve and obtain a great measure of respect and credit. Of course, neither the one nor the other of these institutions will be an element of the Socialist State; but both are of vast importance as transition stages from the present competitive system to the co-operative commonwealth. All thoughtful students of sociology know that our working men owe their comparatively short hours and comparatively high American wages to the Trades Unions; and all thoughtful Trades Unionists know that if they are to maintain, still more, if they are to improve their present status, they have to keep up with the trusts. They know further, that the trusts will go on developing till very likely

by the year 1910 all industrial activities will be under the control of trusts, extending from the Atlantic to the Pacific—and by the way, this is a fact not to be regretted by Socialists, for it is simply playing into the hands of Socialism. When a business has become a trust it is ripe for Socialist control. But this has convinced these Trades Unionists that they must aim at one national syndicate of labor; that is to say, there must finally be one national organization that will control the whole labor force of the country. Hence, the union men, have in advance of other citizens, become imbued with one part of Socialist ethics. They look upon a working man as positively immoral who stands aloof from his fellows and refuses to enter the union of his trade. But I am confident that this ideal of theirs, a national syndicate of labor, can never be realized by the unaided efforts of workingmen. The law must help them; when Socialists get in control of a State legislature they must pass laws that give the Trades Unions a privileged status, thus—as has been said in a very high-flown style, but very truly—“incorporating the working classes into the constitution of their country.” That is to say, in plain words, after it has been ascertained that the Trades Unions are really democratically organized; the law of the State must somehow persuade every workingman to join his union or assembly; that is, must provide all possible motives that may induce him to do this from motives of self-interest, and on the other hand it must be made as disadvantageous as possible for him to remain outside; and the most effective way to accomplish this undoubtedly will be to grant to the union the high privilege of finally determining all purely labor questions for the men in a given trade, whether they are outside or inside; in that way making the union or assembly the legal representative of the workingmen and placing them on an equal footing with the most powerful employers.

We shall find on consideration that such effective Trades Unions are a *sine qua non* of a satisfactory system of Indus-

trial Arbitration. Everybody admits that strikes are now worthless, and Public Opinion is coming vigorously to demand that strikes and lockouts shall cease. Moreover, Prof. Henry C. Adams is surely right when he says: "The establishment of Arbitration is the first step towards the overthrow of the wage system."

But the voluntary arbitration we know so well will not do at all. The arbitration embodied in the law of a majority of our States and in the federal statutes, seems enacted in conscious mockery of the wage earners. This is the way it works: When the strike occurred on the New York Central Railroad, and the State board of arbitration met to mediate, the vice-president haughtily dismissed them with the remark: "There is nothing to arbitrate, gentlemen!" Precisely the same answer was afterwards given by officers of the Carnegie Company to the arbitration board of Pennsylvania in the Homestead strike. No, there is but one effective remedy, and a Socialistically inclined State legislature must apply it; that is, institute Obligatory Industrial Arbitration. No matter if this name be a contradiction of terms, it is the thing itself that is important. What is meant is, that a law be passed giving the State board of Arbitration power and making it its duty, not to invite anybody before it, but to *summons* both employers and employees, both whenever a strike or lockout breaks out, or is even threatened; and after hearing the evidence to adjudge the equities between them, as now courts adjudge contracts; that is, determine what employers can afford to pay and to do and what workingmen can afford to take and to suffer. Of course the cry will arise: "Impracticable! If the decision be against the employees, how in all reason can they be compelled to go on and work against their will? If against the employer, how compel him to carry on his business perhaps at a continuous loss?" Easily enough. If it be against the employees, let them have a few days to consider and make up their minds; if finally they conclude that they will not work on the terms laid down, then let the

employer be at liberty to employ new men, but not before. If against the employer—well, in that case there is no necessity to keep his factory running, but if he chooses to go on he must conform to the decision, i. e., he must do what all know is equitable.

Note, however, that all these propositions can never show their best effect until Socialistically inclined men get hold of the national government and establish government banking and a real department of labor (like that of Switzerland) in place of our present department of statistics and labor.